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Viewing cable 05PARIS7360, AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MICHEL ROCARD

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PARIS7360	2005-10-27 15:56	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:
http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/documents-wikileaks/article/2011/02/09/wikileaks-les-visiteurs-de-l-ambassade_1477418_1446239.htm

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 007360

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MICHEL ROCARD

REF: PARIS 7195

Classified By: Ambassador Craig R. Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Former prime minister Michel Rocard received Ambassador Stapleton October 24. Fresh off the early-October publication of his new book, "If the Left Had Known," and a recent trip to China, Rocard sees the November congress of his Socialist Party (PS) as a historic opportunity. Offering a historical perspective, Rocard stated that the PS, unlike its main counterparts in Europe, has never cut itself off completely with the ideology and politics of "rupture with capitalism." When in power, dealing with the world as it is, the PS has been forced to modernize. This was particularly true during the five years (1997-2002) Lionel Jospin led the party and government. When out of power, it is pulled back by the romanticism of its Marxist roots. Rocard described his historic role in the party as that of the leader of the modernizers -- in the tradition of Jean Jaures, Leon Blum and Pierre Mendes-France. He was hopeful that at the Le Mans Congress in November, the Socialists would make the final break from the past and emerge as a unified Social Democratic Party. Rocard was reluctant to pronounce on the Socialists' stable of presidential contenders, but was skeptical that Jospin would emerge to rally the party to victory; too many can not forgive him for having deserted the ship when he abruptly announced his retirement the morning after his defeat in the first round of the 2002 Presidential elections. Rocard expressed the fear and loathing of Nicolas Sarkozy that is common currency on the left. Dominique de Villepin is a more acceptable alternative on the right -- even if he mistakes himself for Napoleon when he is in fact Cyrano de Bergerac. Rocard, who did not support the war in Iraq, said that if he had been President, he would have privately explained his views to President Bush, but then would have remained with the U.S. Rocard, long chastised by some as "the American in the party," pronounced anti-Americanism a

minority sentiment historically linked to the Communists and Gaullists. He advocated a joint effort, in the form of a European/American think-tank, to identify and address common, emerging challenges. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Rocard, like former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (reftel), believes that French history provides the keys for understanding French politics and France's policies. Rocard's point of departure is France's emergence as a nation-state. The history of other European nation-states is that of linguistic communities serving their trade needs. France created itself by destroying five cultures -- Breton, Occitan, Alsatian, Corsican, and Flemish. "We are the only European nation which is the military creation of a non-homogeneous State. This makes France difficult to govern to this day. This explains our difficulty in reforming, our slowness," he said.

13. (C) The Socialist Party -- and its historic resistance to embrace Social Democracy -- is a case in point. Rocard contrasted the PS with European counterpart parties, noting that in most countries, a Social Democratic party can expect about 35 to 42 percent of the national vote. In France, however, the PS can only count on about 18 to 22 percent, with the Communists taking about 7 to 8 percent, and parties of the extreme left a roughly equal number. The need to work with the Communists, the far left -- and the unformed wing of the PS, makes it difficult to have "feasible, realistic" economic policies. Rocard pointed out that in the 25 EU member states, only the PS, among the main parties of the European left, had split (and a majority of its electorate opposed) over the proposed Constitutional Treaty.

14. (C) Rocard stressed the importance of the upcoming November party congress. The French media insist on focusing on it only as it pertains to the fortunes of the would-be Presidential candidates. While the Congress will have an impact on individual candidacies, its significance will depend on its success in defining the program, even the identity of the party -- amidst debate and soul-searching stirred up by the referendum. Rocard listed three important questions for the party to resolve: Are we Social Democrats? Are we Europeans? Do we admit at last that the market economy is not only a reality, but a necessity? While he thought it possible (and in his view essential) that the Congress will answer each question in the affirmative, this is not a foregone conclusion. The party leadership had taken the right approach in deciding to address the policy issues before proceeding to the selection of a candidate. It has created an opportunity for the Socialist Party to finally emerge as a modern Social Democratic Party comparable to the SPD in Germany or Labor in Britain. Such a "clarifying result" would represent the break from the past that Rocard has long sought. That said, a more tepid result was possible given the strength of the traditionalists, including those now centered around Laurent Fabius.

15. (C) Rocard clearly did not wish to be drawn out on the merits or demerits of the possible Socialist candidates for the Presidency in 2007. Replying to the Ambassador's question on how the PS could transcend its normal 18-to-22-percent electoral take (in the first round of Presidential elections) and furnish a winning presidential candidate, Rocard cited the need for a charismatic candidate and an attractive platform. This winning combination would produce a sufficiently strong showing in the first round so as to obviate the need to negotiate with the Communists and far left -- thereby increasing its appeal to the moderate center in the second round.

16. (C) Noting a media effort by allies of Lionel Jospin to position the former Prime Minister as the only figure who could rally the fissiporous left, Rocard was skeptical. Rocard, in a fair-minded assessment of Jospin, cited his historic contribution of opening up the party in the post-Mitterrand period, a modernization that was cut short by the defeat in 2002. He cited Jospin's honesty, but saw it as a political liability: "Jospin can't bear lying. He is a straight and honest man -- to the point of rigidity. He refuses to make unfillable promises to the electorate." Despite Jospin's virtues, his abrupt departure after his defeat in the first round of the 2002 elections was viewed by too many in the party and among its supporters as an act of desertion in the hour of the party's -- and country's -- greatest need. This would likely disqualify him for another run at the Presidency.

17. (C) Rocard was more voluble when discussing the two Presidential rivals on the right. He compared Prime Minister Villepin favorably to Interior Minister and Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) President Nicolas Sarkozy. Even if Villepin had gained notice by his 2003 speech before the UN Security Council, not a pleasant association for the U.S. it is Sarkozy whom we should fear. Villepin "knows the limits of power." Sarkozy, by contrast, has traveled little, has minimal foreign language ability, and only a meager interest

in international issues. He employs a language when addressing illegal immigrants that Rocard characterized as 'borderline racist.' In short, "Sarkozy is not safe in his respect for human rights. He's not Le Pen, but he's a danger to the balance of the French Republic in its practice of human rights." By contrast, Villepin shares our common values concerning human right. In addition, "he is someone who would never mistake those who are allies with those who are not" (sic).

18. (C) Rocard, however, also expressed his "anger" at Villepin for the 2003 UNSC speech, which he thought had been counter-productive, particularly with respect to then-Secretary Powell. "We should have been supporting Powell; instead, Villepin pushed him into a corner." Rocard said that if he had been President of France at the time, he would have written a four or five page letter to President Bush at the outset, setting forth his misgivings over a military solution. The letter would have remained confidential. Once the U.S. decided to proceed against Iraq,

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however, he would have remained silent, and not led international opposition as Chirac and Villepin had done. Rocard joked that Villepin identifies with Napoleon, whereas he is in fact more a Cyrano de Bergerac character. He is the inheritor of a proud French oral tradition: "We like to talk; if you want a silent partner, you should be dealing with the Finns instead."

19. (C) Rocard emphasized to the Ambassador the importance of not conflating the loud French anti-Americanism espoused by the Communists and Gaullists with the pro-American sentiment felt by most French people. "Please don't forget," he said, "that anti-Americanism has never won a majority here." He criticized the U.S., however, for not having listened to "friendly" advice in the lead-up to the Iraq war. The French, who lost two colonial wars, in Indochina and Algeria, he said, tried to warn the U.S. that it would be unavoidable -- "sociologically predictable" -- that the Iraqi factions would unite against the USG. He emphasized, however, the necessity for the U.S. to stay the course, warning that Iraq would descend into civil war if the U.S. left before 2010-2012.

11. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question on the consequences for Europe of the failure of the constitutional treaty, Rocard said he thought it "less important than many believe, and not too important to the U.S." There is indeed a resultant paralysis, but not of the functioning of the EU. Rather, it has incapacitated the creative energy and enthusiasm for the European project. "It kills the idea of a political Europe which you (the U.S.) were afraid of, and does not change a thing in the integrated market." He provided his assessment that the current Administration's support for Europe had been hesitant, and for two reasons: concern over the possible emergence of Europe as a military power separate from NATO/US; and, increasing conflict over economic and commercial issues, which was an unavoidable result of Europe's development as strong, unitary player in the international economy.

12. (C) Rocard proposed a joint European/American think-tank, which might fill a current gap -- a place where Europeans and Americans can together consider the challenges of tomorrow. Speaking of the growth of India and China, along with all the other challenges confronting both of us, he said, "We need a vehicle where we can find solutions for these challenges together -- so when these monsters arrive in 10 years, we will be able to deal with them."
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